



TOWN OF BERWYN HEIGHTS

Prince George's County, Maryland

Incorporated in 1896 ~ Sixth Oldest Municipality in PG County

TOWN MEETING MINUTES MARCH 13, 2013

The meeting was called to order at 8:00 p.m. Present were Mayor Calvo, Mayor Pro Tem (MPT) Wilkinson, CMs Dennison and Kulpa-Eddy. CM Almoguera had an excused absence. Also present were Town Administrator (TA) Murphy, Chief of Police Antolik, Treasurer Lape, Clerk Harper and citizens.

Mayor Calvo led the Pledge of Allegiance.

1. PRESENTATION

Mayor Calvo announced that Corporal Michelle Bennett will retire as an officer of the Berwyn Heights Police Department and has come to bid the Town good bye. Antolik said that he has known Ms. Bennett since she was a child and is sad to see her go. She was an excellent community resource officer and an asset to the Town. In appreciation of her service, Chief Antolik presented her with a retirement badge.

Mayor Calvo said that Officer Bennett joined the Berwyn Heights police in 2006 after a less than satisfying career at the Prince George's County Police Department. During his time as Mayor, he has not met another officer, who has embraced service for the Town with the same enthusiasm. Ms. Bennett was particularly successful in forging a close relationship with the young people of Berwyn Heights. She will also be remembered for transforming National Night Out into an event that is rivaling in popularity only by Berwyn Heights Day. Mayor Calvo presented Ms. Bennett with a plaque to thank her for her service.

Officer Bennett said that Berwyn Heights felt like a breath of fresh air after her service on the Prince George's County police force. The friendly reception she received inspired a new commitment to her job and the people she served. She loved working with young people and their families, and thanks the Town of Berwyn Heights for giving her this opportunity.

MPT Wilkinson said that Officer Bennett has been a wonderful female role model for children, especially minority children. He thanked her for her conscientious professional interaction with the school community, which will be greatly missed. CM Kulpa-Eddy thanked Ms. Bennett for her support and cooperation with the Neighborhood Watch/Emergency Preparedness Committee. CM Dennison said that it was good to have a woman officer to talk to, and thanked Ms. Bennett for her family.

2. MINUTES

Clerk Harper read a summary of the February 13 Town meeting minutes. On a motion by CM Dennison and second by MPT Wilkinson, the minutes were approved.

3. TREASURER'S REPORT

Treasurer Lape gave the Treasurer's report for the month of February. Mayor Calvo asked to break out speed camera revenues as a separate item in future treasurer's reports.

4. MAYOR'S REPORT

Mayor Calvo welcomed TA Murphy back from a 2 month absence. Mayor Calvo gave an overview of the proposed FY 2014 budget, which is structured to compensate for a 16% decline in real property tax revenues after the recent assessment. The revenue shortfall reduces the budget by 10% overall or \$261,500, but maintains existing tax rates. An increase of 21% or \$60,000 in income tax receipts helps offset some of the losses. A \$33,000 increase in Highway User Revenues (HUR) and an uptick in receipts from Code fines and fees also make up some of the lost revenue.

Despite the offsets, TA Murphy had to make \$135,000 in cuts to the operating budget to balance revenues and expenditures. This was accomplished mainly by eliminating vacant full-time positions in the Police and Public Works Departments, as well as some part-time hours in the Code Department. The Parks & Recreation budget was reduced by 11% by cutting the playground equipment appropriation. It is hoped that a state grant will pay for a complete overhaul of the Poplar playground. Health insurance costs are expected to increase by 11% but exact figures remain unknown until the Town receives the quotes for next year in Maryland. The infrastructure reserve is in good shape because of the increase in Highway User Revenues. This enables the Town to plan for another street renovation project near the future.

Mayor Calvo continued that the Town of Berwyn Heights remains in a strong financial position. Strong reserves and a substantial surplus provide a cushion to get the Town through the difficult times. The Town Council plans to mitigate the cuts in personnel in the Police and Public Works Department by providing funds to increase the hours of current part-time staff when needed. The Council is also thinking about giving a cost of living increase (COLA) to Town employees, whose salaries have kept up with the rate of inflation and higher benefit contributions. Residents are welcome to give input on the proposed budget in upcoming worksessions.

In other news, Mayor Calvo reported that he, CM Kulpa-Eddy and TA Murphy spent last Saturday in Annapolis testifying on a bond bill. The bill was sponsored by Berwyn Heights' legislative delegation and will help fund emergency generators at the Town Center and the Town Administration Building. The State and the Town would pay half of the estimated \$160,000 it would cost to install the backup gas generators. Berwyn Heights also signed a Four Cities letter supporting the relocation of the FBI Headquarters to Greenbelt Station and sent an individual letter as well. The relocation is widely believed to be a big boost to this area's economy and has stirred a lot of interest among residents.

Further, Mayor Calvo commended the Neighborhood Watch/Emergency Preparedness Committee (NW/EP) for the CERT workshop they held last weekend. It drew more than 30 people, including 8 from Berwyn Heights. When he stopped by, he was impressed with the level of organization and the enthusiasm in the room.

5. DEPARTMENT REPORTS

Administration: No report.

Code Compliance: CM Kulpa-Eddy corrected a statement she made at the last Town meeting: the new code car is a Ford Escape, not a Ford Explorer. Further, Kulpa-Eddy said she had the opportunity to listen to the hearing on the FBI Headquarters relocation in the US House of Representatives this morning. The GSA Services Administration (GSA) received 35 packets in response to its Request for Information from interested jurisdictions, including West Virginia and Pennsylvania. Maryland was represented by Steny Hoyer and Donna Edwards. It will take approximately 60 days for GSA to go through the information packets and narrow the list. A formal Request for Proposals may be issued sometime in the summer.

In Code news, CM Kulpa-Eddy appealed to business owners to keep up their properties. As businesses are located mostly along Greenbelt Road, they are the first many people see of the Town of Berwyn Heights. A well kept business district not only gives a good impression of the Town but will help draw customers and customers. The Town has a clean lot ordinance that details the requirements for maintaining commercial properties. This includes keeping grass cut below 6 inches, and trees and shrubs neatly trimmed so that they do not obscure sight lines for drivers. All structures including parking lots must be structurally sound and kept free of trash and litter.

Parks and Recreation, Education and Civic Affairs: CM Dennison announced an upcoming Talent Show on April 19 and Berwyn Heights Day on May 4. All committees should attend the next Recreation Council meeting to coordinate their participation.

Public Health and Safety: Chief Antolik gave the police activities report for February. There were 4 Part I offenses, as opposed to the 5 year average for February 6. The year-to-date total is 7, half of the 5 year average of 13.2. Police also issued 60 State and 41 Town citations. The speed camera program generated 51 tick on Pontiac Street and 218 on Greenbelt Road, for a total of 269. Lastly, Chief Antolik issued reminders for celebrating a safe St. Patrick's Day.

James Hurley, President of the Berwyn Heights Volunteer Fire Department (BHVFD) reported that the Department had a busy month, with fires in Greenbelt, Lanham and numerous accidents. Two fire fighters participated in the CERT training last weekend and were certified. Mr. Hurley encouraged the Council and residents to follow the BHVFD on their website at www.BHVFD14.org as well as on Facebook and Twitter for the latest news.

Mr. Hurley said that BHVFD heard from the Fire Commission that the County Fire Department's budget will be tight next year. There is likely to be a change in billing procedure for ambulance services as a result of the expiration of an MOU with the County this June. Currently, the County bills for ambulance service to volunteer companies, who mostly own their ambulances, receive a share of the receipts. This largest source of revenue for BHVFD is now somewhat uncertain.

Mr. Hurley said that the BHVFD's fundraising drive has ended for this year and receipts continued to go down. Although an effort is made to keep the list of donors updated, the donations mostly come from the same families. The department hopes that the Town will continue to support it with a donation. A welcome development was the introduction of Senate Bill 0899, which appropriates state money for volunteer companies to maintain and upgrade their facilities. He will let the Town know if a letter of support would be useful.

Public Works: MPT Wilkinson reported that the Nevada Street trail is now completed and connects Nevada Street with Indian Creek trail. Further, he has reported that the PGCP's construction office has put sidewalks out to bid connecting the old to the new Greenbelt Middle School. The State Highway Administration is out for an on-site visit regarding the safe routes to school grant. Prospects for funding a sidewalk on the 8900 block of 63rd Avenue are good. SHA officials had questions about the raised crosswalk on Pontiac Street, and expressed reservations about funding sidewalks on the 8700 block of 62nd Avenue because of compliance issues.

In other news, the Public Works Department is making plans to prepare for a tighter budget and less manpower next year. Last week, Public Works prepped the town for another snow storm that did not materialize, cleaned up dangling utility wires and marked tree stumps along Quebec Street for removal. MPT Wilkinson reminded residents not to put yard waste into recycling bins. Rather it should be placed into plastic or paper yard waste bags. The next electronic recycling date is on April 10. Meanwhile, old electronics can be disposed at Best Buy, and light bulbs at MOM's organic market.

6. COMMITTEE REPORTS

Green Team: Mayor Calvo reported that the Green Team is working on a plan for Berwyn Heights to obtain certification under the Sustainable Maryland program. Last weekend, the Green Team helped students plant strawberries at the school gardens. Another project involves setting up a collection point at the Town Center for electronic items, including batteries and light bulbs.

Neighborhood Watch/Emergency Preparedness: Mike Attick reported that the CERT training workshop was a great success with 32 participants coming from as far away as Fort Washington and Baltimore. One elderly participant suffered an asthma attack. As Berwyn Heights ambulances were out on a call, it took the Branchville ambulance 7 minutes to arrive after a 911 call had been made. Mr. Attick said that the delay is due to staff shortages at the Branchville Fire Department, and the negative impact of the County's decision to remove all professional fire fighters from that department. Further, a free CPR class is scheduled in Bowie next month. Interested residents should contact Chair Ron Shane to register.

7. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

There was none.

8. NEW BUSINESS

There was none.

9. CITIZENS DISCUSSION

Mr. Attick suggested the Town make available a dumpster or trash container at the Public Works yard for residents to drop off old electronic equipment the week of an electronic recycling day at the Greenbelt Public Works yard. Berwyn Heights employees could take those items with them when helping out on that day.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:20 p.m.

Signed: Kerstin Harper, Town Clerk

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